

ST. THOMAS MORE IS PROCLAIMED PATRON OF POLITICIANS

16th-Century English Martyr Praised by John Paul II

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 26, 2000 (ZENIT.org).- John Paul II has proclaimed St. Thomas More as the patron of governors and politicians.

The announcement was made through the Vatican Press Office today. On hand were Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, president of the Central Committee of the Great Jubilee; Italian Senator Francesco Cossiga; Britain's Lord David Alton of the House of Lords; and Italian Senator Ombretta Fumagalli Carulli, president of the Inter-Parliamentary Jubilee Group.

In his address, Cardinal Etchegaray said that as the Jubilee of those with political responsibilities approaches, "John Paul II has made them a great gift, naming St. Thomas More as their heavenly patron, a patron of such high standing, the measure of all those who must manage public affairs."

The cardinal said that the English saint's name was suggested by people of all political persuasions throughout the world.

The Pope agreed with their choice because "it was precisely in the defense of the rights of conscience where the example of Thomas More shone with intense light," a papal statement said.

Born around 1477, More was chancellor of England. He parted ways with King Henry VIII over the issue of divorce and opposed the monarch's later break with the Church. More was executed in July 1535.

Referring to More's biography, and quoting Pius XI words at the time of the martyr's canonization in 1935, Cardinal Etchegaray said: "What a well-rounded man!"

"All Anglicans and Catholics have seen in him, in the first place, not only as a saint but as a hero of conscience and a martyr of the faith; and political men, no matter what their belief or unbelief, have regarded him as one of the greatest representatives of the juridical traditions of which England is so rightfully proud," the cardinal added.

He said that the Pope's proclamation "reminds (politicians and governors) of the absolute primacy of God, including in public affairs. At a time of the eclipse of conscience, the Pope shows all of us a man who preferred death to life in fidelity to his conscience, a conscience that has not ceased to enlighten, in God's light and the counsel of wise men, far from all fanaticism and subjectivism."

"It is not easy to praise conscience and witness to its supreme value, because it demands the constant care of formation and maturation for man to discover 'the presence of a law that has not been given by himself and that must be obeyed,'" Cardinal Etchegaray said, echoing a line from Vatican II's pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*.

"When one reads Thomas More's moving letters from prison," he continued, "one understands better to what extent the obligation of conscience, which he placed before all pre-established authorities, stemmed from his sanctity."

By imitating More, the cardinal added, people will feel more called to sanctity, more free because they will be more detached from everything, and more joyful because they will be more loving toward all.